



JOINT Urban Studies CENTER

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From left to right:

Lisa Butchko, King's College; Joe DeAngelis, Wilkes University; Paul Delaney, Penn State-Wilkes-Barre; Melissa Stever, Wilkes University; Andrew Wakefield, King's College; Frank Knorek, Wilkes University; and Steve Vrabel, Penn State Wilkes-Barre.

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A Letter From The Executive Director

The best description of a region comes from a publication by the Center of Governmental Studies written in the late 1990s: "A region is a community of interests that may be as small as a single neighborhood or as large as several states or even nations." Thinking regionally means thinking beyond political boundaries to the boundaries of those sharing a common interest. It means understanding that planning within a region is not synonymous with regional planning. Thinking regionally means building coalitions that are often informal and tailored to specific projects focusing on job creation, tourism, transportation, land use, housing, any combination of these, or any other issues with regional impact.

Regions are fluid. One geographic area may partner with another area on land use and transportation issues and partner with yet another area on economic development programs. Regions can still compete, yet they can come together on common issues to solve problems, plan, or create a vision. The reasons for partnering may be for short-term issues or projects, or a long-term partnership.

Many of us live, work, shop, and play without regard to political borders. Rarely does a person live, work, and purchase all of his/her goods and services in a particular community. Businesses do not buy all their goods and services, hire all their employees, and sell all their products in one community. Therefore, most individuals and businesses operate within more than one region.

In June, JUSC released four reports: *University/Community Partnerships Phase I*, *Regionalism: A Primer*, *Arts & Culture: Impact on Community*, and *Regional Implications of Bond Rating Methodology*. Each report provides readers with a complete description of the current situation and what the future may hold for each particular topic.

All four reports are unique in nature, yet they each point toward one common theme: Regionalism.

Each report can be found on the JUSC website. We recommend that you view all four reports, as each topic is vital to the future and our region. To help understand each topic, JUSC has provided excerpts and summaries of each of the four reports throughout the following pages of the newsletter.



Excerpt from “Regionalism: A Primer”



Critical economic advantages, such as skills, knowledge, and quality of life, are shaped at the regional level through education, ordinances, and public policy. Capitalizing on the talent, information sharing, and the economies of scale when collaborating usually lead to successful outcomes.

Many issues that political authorities must deal with cross jurisdictional boundaries. Airports, arenas, and art centers serve wide areas. Air, water, railways, and highways do not respect political boundaries. Regardless of political affiliation, all communities deal with public safety, essential services, and administrative duties.

Regional cooperation is much more than inter-governmental cooperation. Regional cooperation pulls together players from government, private and nonprofit sectors, industry, retail, social service agencies, and civic organizations. A common interest exists in coming together to increase resources and find competitive niches, not necessarily in creating new organizations or layers of government. This practice is called civic leadership or regional stewardship. It exists when the various stakeholders develop a commitment to the long-term well-being of a place.

The Alliance for Regional Stewardship identified four key areas whereby regional leadership can focus:

- Developing the new economy: preparing people and places to succeed in the changing world and increasing an area’s competitiveness.
- Livable communities: creating great places to live, work, and play.
- Social inclusion: ensuring that everyone is included.
- Governance reform: finding new ways to govern regionally as opposed to regional governments.

In the Joint Urban Studies Center (JUSC) report entitled “Regionalism,” you can see what effect regionalism can have on a variety of issues. From shared municipal and education services, regionalism can play a vital role in furthering the development of a region. Case studies from across the country demonstrate how successful partnerships play a major role in energizing a region. Partnerships, collaborations, and consortia are all necessary components of creating regionalism.

**“Critical economic advantages, such as skills, knowledge, and quality of life, are shaped at the regional level through education, ordinances, and public policy.”
- JUSC**

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Excerpt from “Regionalism: A Primer” Continued

This report highlights the following themes which are necessary to have a successful regional effort:

- communication and collaboration
- capacity
- marketing, public relations, and education

To help carry out these suggestions, JUSC has identified several mechanisms that are currently in place:

1. Existing Regional Collaborations
2. Joint Urban Studies Center (JUSC)
3. University/Community Partnerships

Through proper planning and communication, this region can adopt and use regionalism effectively. Our region contains many assets that could make us even more successful. Some examples are: recreation and venue assets, our transportation infrastructure, diversified, major employers, and a strong higher education infrastructure. Utilizing this foundation to move forward, we can begin to capitalize on our assets. The research and recommendations throughout the report create a strong base for future regional development.

With cooperation and collaboration, this region can be viewed as an attractive location — for businesses looking to relocate, as well as tourists, and residents. Together, both Luzerne and Lackawanna counties can make this region a 21st century economic success story.

For the full JUSC report, please visit our website at www.urbanstudies.org/research



JUSC Intern Update

The JUSC had seven new student interns this summer. Each student has demonstrated a hard work ethic and desire to accomplish the tasks assigned. Each has performed research on a wide variety of topics, including housing, education, and environmental issues.

King's College students are: Lisa Butchko (Political Science) and Andrew Wakefield (History/Political Science).

Penn State Wilkes-Barre students are: Paul Delaney (Business Management) and Steve Vrabel (Business Administration).

Wilkes University students are: Joseph A. DeAngelis (Communications/Earth and Environmental Sciences), Frank Knorek (Political Science/Business Administration), and Melissa Steber (Business Administration).

Each student intern served throughout the summer with JUSC.

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information
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internships,
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University/Community Partnerships Phase I

JUSC recently released part one of a two part report on University-Community Partnerships (UCPs). The report identified the background and concepts associated with successful and not so successful partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHE) and their surrounding communities. It included the identification of the basic concepts of these partnerships. Later this year, JUSC will publish part two of the report that will take a more proactive role in identifying possible funding opportunities and initiatives for local institutions of higher education and their community partners. These will be based upon their strengths and the needs of our communities.

Locally, there are many examples of successful partnerships with colleges and universities helping surrounding communities and positively affecting the local economy. Some of the programs and initiatives will be identified in the report. For example, Wilkes University, King's College, and Luzerne County Community College employ nearly 900 people in downtown Wilkes-Barre alone. Institutions of higher education are major employers of a highly skilled and educated workforce. These schools buy goods and use local services. They strive to beautify and improve the neighborhoods they are located in. Their employees buy goods and services that are close to their workplace. These are just a few of the benefits that are provided to our communities by our institutions of higher education. They are desirable cornerstones of communities. The presence of numerous institutions of higher education in northeastern Pennsylvania is an asset to our communities.



To view both of these JUSC reports in their entirety, please visit our website at www.urbanstudies.org

Regional Implications of Bond Rating Methodology

The Joint Urban Studies Center (JUSC), a research-based think tank working in collaboration with six area colleges and universities, recently completed a study of the impact of bond rating methodology on the counties and communities in northeastern Pennsylvania.

The study points to the fact that this region, Luzerne and Lackawanna counties, and all of its communities need to work together to enhance their assets while mitigating the common challenges. JUSC's study shows that the major bond rating agencies (and insurers), such as Standard & Poor's and Moody's, look at the broader economic region as they determine the cost of capital for local government financing.

Recent examples of local bond issuances point to delays and higher costs because of challenges in neighboring communities. JUSC's recommendations are clear. The bottom line or cost to local government and its taxpayers is affected by problems in surrounding communities. That alone is a compelling reason for communities to work together to solve problems. The purpose of the report is to demonstrate the economic interdependence within this region by understanding the methodology of the major bond rating agencies (and insurers); and the similarities facing the communities in our region. Background on the purpose of municipal bonds and bond insurance is provided to set the context of the discussion.

A strong example in proving our case is that Moody's considers the role that an issuer's (local government or other bond issuing authority) local economy plays in its regional economy. Understanding a municipality's economic profile relative to its neighbor's profile enables analysts to develop a context for economic indicators. This clearly states that the condition (fiscal or otherwise of one community) has an effect on a neighboring community, and therefore, makes it part of a regional economy. Thus, it is proven that as part of a regional economy, the bottom line of the public sector is affected by the circumstance of other public sector entities surrounding it.



Excerpt From “Arts and Culture: Impact on Community”

The city of Wilkes-Barre has much to offer in terms of arts and culture, recreation, and venues. However, due in part to the lack of mass marketing of our communities and especially our region, many who live in our region and those looking to relocate here don't have a clear picture of our regional attributes. The study highlights some of the arts and cultural activities that occur in the city, as well as a few festivals and performing arts centers in the region. The study is not meant to be a comprehensive regional survey of all events and venues. As research for this study progressed, it was once again brought to our attention that we need to think regionally. Many of the problems that occur in the city of Wilkes-Barre also occur in Scranton, Hazleton, Pittston, and other municipalities in our region. By thinking regionally we mean:

- Marketing our region, not just one city, municipality, or county;
- Forming partnerships across geographical boundaries;
- Promoting our regional assets through regional tourism offices, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations; and
- Being proactive and progressive

The study also provides the reader with success stories that have taken place in communities across the country and as close as Bethlehem, Pa. These success stories provide valuable insights into communities that realize the impact of the arts in their community or region. As our study shows, these communities have realized financial rewards through the economic impact of the arts. Communities have prospered by providing new and exciting experiences for their residents. Each community has grown culturally and economically. Partnerships and collaborations have also formed among arts organizations that allow individual projects to become part of a broader focus and together, they act as a support system for each other.

For the full JUSC report, please visit our website at www.urbanstudies.org/research



“The city of Wilkes-Barre has much to offer in terms of arts and culture, recreation, and venues.”
- JUSC



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JUSC Mission Statement

JUSC's mission is to assist in the revitalization of small to mid-sized cities through the utilization of the center's expertise and resources. These include its member university, colleges, and their respective faculties and students. JUSC serves as a resource and consultant for effective and efficient government, best practices, preparation of applied research, strategy development, and the process for its implementation. Based upon those efforts, we develop a model for replication by other small and mid-size cities confronting similar challenges.



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